

# Introduction to the Idaho Master Naturalist Program



## Chapter Goals:

After completing this chapter, volunteers should be able to:

- Describe what a Master Naturalist is. Identify and communicate the mission and goals of the Master Naturalist program.
- Identify and communicate the requirements and responsibilities of an Idaho Master Naturalist.
- Discuss the purpose and requirements of the file box and bound curriculum.
- Identify partnering organizations' missions and philosophies.
- Understand how Idaho's Master Naturalists are organized.
- Identify how Master Naturalists find/choose projects to work on.
- Describe the resources available to Idaho Master Naturalists.
- Become familiar with administrative processes, such as keeping track of hours and volunteer recruitment.

## What is the Idaho Master Naturalist Program?

If you are reading this section, you probably already know what an Idaho Master Naturalist is, and chances are you are working to become one. *The mission of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to actively work toward stewardship of Idaho's natural environment.* To explain the program better, let's break down the name and mission.

### The Idaho Master Naturalist Program-What is in the name?

You are probably familiar with the popular Master Gardener Program. Many states have developed Master Naturalist Programs (see history section below) and named them such due to the similarities to the Master Gardener Program. In Idaho, the name for this program was LONG debated.

The content included in the education sessions has been developed to give you a broad overview of important ecological topics. This is not a master's degree! We believe nobody can truly become a "master" of the knowledge about nature ... it is endless. The term "naturalist" means different things to different people. Broadly defined a naturalist studies nature and is connected with nature through knowledge and interest.

As an Idaho Master Naturalist, you are encouraged to connect with both nature and your community by increasing your knowledge of nature and using that knowledge toward conservation efforts where you live.

Becoming a naturalist is a process, not an end in and of itself. At the end of your required education and service time, you will earn the title of Idaho Master Naturalist. But that won't mark the end of your learning and volunteering.

*"...To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers...*

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers, program leaders strive to foster high-quality adult educational opportunities. We hope the content of the education is challenging and interesting. We believe that experience is the best teacher. That is why we value what experiences you bring to the program and we value providing great experiences for you. The education provided is designed to be diverse, ranging from classroom lectures to hands-on activities, reading, writing, discussing topics, and field experiences. We believe that we alone cannot develop a corps of well-informed volunteers. Rather, together with you, we can all create meaningful educational experiences that will prepare us to work together for conservation in Idaho.

*...to actively work toward stewardship...*

This part of the mission may seem vague. It was written that way on purpose. We have developed two Idaho Master Naturalist Tracks: Citizen Science and Conservation Education. However, in the future, we hope to have many tracks available to participants. We see a future of volunteers working in fields as diverse as data collection and educational programs to habitat restoration and public art! We have projects with which we need help, but stewardship is a job for all of us. No matter where you choose to spend your time volunteering, there is a net gain for everyone! Just as each plant and animal evolves to find its niche in an ecosystem, we encourage you to find your niche in conservation.

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, *stewardship* means *the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care*. In this sense, the Idaho Master Naturalist Program advocates taking care of Idaho's environment not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of the other species, plants and animals that share our state.

*...of Idaho's natural environment."*

Your volunteer work can manifest itself in many different ways. We want you to concentrate your volunteerism in your local community. There are many opportunities to do this directly; for example, collecting data about wildlife, working on habitat restoration, surveying for plants, and monitoring nests. Indirect work toward the environment comes in the form of teaching classes, working at nature centers, preparing brochures and written material for the public, and helping

educate people about conservation. Whatever work you choose, as long as it contributes directly or indirectly to stewardship and conservation of Idaho's natural environment, it will be beneficial! Your local chapter coordinating committee may have limitations on where you can volunteer, but undoubtedly, there will be something for everyone.

## **Why was the Idaho Master Naturalist program created?**

- Over the last 40 years, Idaho's population has more than doubled (from 667,191 in 1960 to 1,466,465 in 2006) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Today, 62% of Idaho's residents are classified as residents of urban areas, compared to 54% in 1980. Between 1990 and 2000, Idaho's population grew 28.5%. Idaho was ranked the third fastest growing state in 2004-2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). It is predicted that by 2050, 4.5 million acres of farm, ranch and open space in Idaho will be lost due to urban and suburban development (Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2006).
- Idaho has nearly 600 species of vertebrates (85 fish species, 15 amphibians, 24 reptiles, 361 birds and 113 mammals). Only 4% of these species can be hunted, fished or trapped, leaving the vast majority of them classified as nongame species. The management of nongame wildlife receives neither tax dollars nor hunting and fishing license sales revenues. Managing nongame species is under-funded yet crucial to the integrity of Idaho's ecosystems and all of Idaho's wildlife.
- Idaho has several local natural resource and conservation organizations with education, outreach, and service as part of their missions. Due to limited funding, nearly all of these organizations depend on well-trained adult volunteers to conduct programs, help researchers collect data, operate parks and visitor centers, and help with all types of natural resource and conservation work.
- Only 38% of Idaho land is privately owned. The rest is managed by public agencies with ever-decreasing budgets and personnel.
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game and other natural resource agencies and organizations want to involve citizens in conservation. It is explicitly stated in our agency's goals to seek out and welcome public input in decision making and tasks to carry out our mission. We believe that only with adequate involvement, input and partnerships with the citizens of Idaho, can we truly manage Idaho's resources for future generations.

We are clearly outnumbered with broadening and complex natural resource challenges that require an understanding of complex ecological dynamics at a local level. Taking care of Idaho is

everyone's business. Conservation and stewardship are not spectator sports. Idaho needs an involved and educated citizenry, willing to demonstrate their commitment toward conserving and managing the natural and cultural resources of Idaho. Humans—as in Master Naturalist Volunteers—are essential to the conservation and management of a better Idaho. We need more volunteers, like you, bringing together your diverse set of personal and professional skills in order to creatively tackle our natural resource challenges and accomplish more for Idaho's environment.

This cannot be done alone. The development of a culture of conservation with the help of you as volunteers has resulted and will continue to result in each Idahoan bearing personal responsibility for the management and conservation of the natural and cultural resources of the state. Through outreach, education, interpretation, recreation and science, you can help lead Idahoans to a better understanding of the responsibilities of stewardship, resource management and conservation.

## History of the Master Naturalist Concept

The first Master Naturalist Program was formed in Fort Collins, CO in 1994 as a part of the city's Natural Space Program. The citizens of Fort Collins approved a sales tax to preserve natural space in and around the town. Part of the initiative mandated education and interpretation about these spaces to the public. As a result of this mandate, the first Master Naturalist program was created. This local program trained volunteers to give educational programs to the public regarding the value of natural spaces.

Statewide Master Naturalist Programs have typically been modeled after Master Gardener Programs. The first Master Gardener Program was developed in Washington State in 1973 and has trained over 4000 Master Gardener volunteers in that state alone (Chalker-Scott & Collman, 2006). The Master Gardener program is a function of state extension services and was created out of the need to “assist Washington State University Extension faculty in delivering applied plant and soil science information to individuals, communities and horticulture professionals” (Chalker-Scott & Collman, 2006). After required education, Master Gardeners are set out in the community to provide educational programs, identify plants, insects, diseases, and to provide information to their fellow community members regarding gardening and landscaping. A “rigorous, scientifically based curriculum” is used during the 50 hours of required training, followed by a mandatory 50 hours of service for certification.





In 1996, Texas became the first state to put the Master Gardener model into practice as a state-wide Master Naturalist Program. The Texas Master Naturalist Program (TMNP) has in turn, served as the model for most other state's Master Naturalist Programs, including Idaho's. This program requires 40 hours of training, 40 hours of service and 8 additional hours of training every year for certification. The goal of the Texas Master Naturalist Program is to "develop a corps of well-educated 'Master Volunteers' to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated toward the beneficial management of natural resources within their communities" (Texas A&M University, 2006). Visit <http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu/> to learn more about the Texas program.

The Texas program is formed through a partnership between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Cooperative Extension. This combination of resources has proven to be a successful partnership in Texas, as the program by 2007 consisted of 35 chapters and had trained 3,400 volunteers. In 2005 the Texas Master Naturalists volunteered 136,000 hours of time toward conservation projects and education (492,100 to date). The estimated value of this volunteer time was \$2.38 million. Also in 2005, over 221,000 youth, adults, and private landowners were reached through TMN outreach activities (one million to date). Seventy-five thousand acres of habitat have been affected by volunteer projects.

The positive results from Texas and many other states, along with the success of the Master Gardener Program, suggest the general model of science-based training and volunteer service is a way to educate citizens about conservation issues and promote individual action toward improving and supporting natural resource management. Today there are 26 statewide Master Naturalist-type programs across the country.

Most other Master Naturalist programs have depended upon and are successful because of partnerships. Agencies partnering to create an Idaho Master Naturalist chapter may vary from region to region. The curriculum has been designed to accommodate different agencies, topics and regional concepts. Get to know your partnering agencies that are sponsoring your Master Naturalist Chapter! Consider volunteering for these agencies in their efforts to conserve nature in Idaho.

## **What is a Naturalist?**

Naturalists are students of natural science or natural history. For most, becoming a naturalist is a life-long goal. Learning never stops, as the natural world presents an infinite number of things to investigate. Yet, many would agree that natural history is an almost obsolete term for the study of things in nature-plants, animals, minerals. In fact, the word "naturalist" brings to mind such

historic figures as Carl Linnaeus, John Muir, John Burroughs, and Aldo Leopold. So, are naturalists outdated, old fashioned types of investigators, students and teachers? Hardly! Although natural history may have begun as somewhat unsystematic approach to investigating the environment and its inhabitants, modern naturalist are scientist in the truest sense. They interact with the environment through careful observation, study, and analysis.

Before the current trend towards *specialization* in which scientists tend to know more and more about less and less, professional scientist were naturalist in a broad sense. In the past and today, naturalists are characterized by knowing something about the whole of nature-they are *generalists*. Although usually training in one discipline, they delve into a variety of subjects including botany, entomology, ornithology, mammalogy, herpetology and geology. Naturalists emphasize field investigations as opposed to laboratory work. A naturalist can be defined as someone who possesses extensive knowledge of the natural world. More importantly, modern naturalists understand that in nature rarely anything stands alone. The interconnectedness of all living things to each other and to their environment is the essence of the study of natural history. Therefore, naturalists also become ecologists, ethologists, and environmentalists. They study *relationships* in nature. They are people that understand that the natural world is not separate from human existence-we are surrounded by nature and we act upon it.

But naturalists aren't just trained scientists. They are people with a real appreciation and respect for nature. They are people equipped with the tools necessary to be a naturalist-and not just a quirky hat and binoculars. A desire to ask questions and seek answers, resources for naming and identifying things, a concern for the environment and an awareness of the threats to nature are a few of the naturalist's tools.

The term Master Naturalist, as used in this program, describes the scope of your training and the areas of your knowledge. The natural world comprises a variety of complicated, interrelated subjects and many questions still remain unanswered. None of us have or can truly *master* the natural world. But, we can master the skills of those that came before us, including careful observation, note-taking, asking questions and evaluation. So wear the title as a representation of this program, but understand that becoming a true Master Naturalist is a goal that can only be approached, never attained. Naturalists work to gain the wisdom of those that came before them, to build on that knowledge, and teach those who will come after them.

## **What is an Idaho Master Naturalist?**

Idaho Master Naturalists are volunteers with the interest and desire to give back to their community and willingness to attend the education sessions. The Idaho Master Naturalist Program has three components: education, volunteer service, and advanced education.



## Master Naturalist Certification

As set by state guidelines, completion of 40 hours of education, 40 hours of service certifies each participant as an Idaho Master Naturalist. These requirements are the state-wide minimum standards for certification. Local chapters may require more.

During your first year of involvement in the Master Naturalist program you are expected to complete a combination of at least 40 hours of hands-on classroom and field experiences delivered by resource experts, professionals and specialists and designed to give you and understanding of natural history and ecological process influencing your local ecosystems. In return for this education, and prior to your certifications a Master Naturalist, you will complete 40 hours of volunteer service within the first year of starting the program. In your second year and each year after, another 40 hours of service and 8 hours of education are required to keep your certification.

My Chapter Requires:

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Hours of core education  
the first year.

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Hours of advanced  
education the first year  
and each year after.

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A trained volunteer, no matter how little or how much volunteer service they are providing the chapter within a given year is always considered an Idaho Master Naturalist volunteer. Master Naturalist volunteers in any given year are either “Certified” or working toward certification for that year.

## Master Naturalist Education

The overall goals of our curriculum are to provide non-biased natural resource information and materials in an interesting format to inspire you to become stewards of your natural resources and to share that information and enthusiasm with others. This curriculum was designed by resource professionals from state wildlife agencies, universities, and nongovernmental partners to provide you basic hands-on knowledge in the function, management and interpretation of the ecosystems and natural resources of your local area. This education can benefit everyone-from professionals wanting to increase the scope of their knowledge to the general public who has an interest in conserving our natural resources.

40 hours of service  
+ 40 hours of education  
**IMNP CERTIFICATION**

Because Idaho has such diversity in climate, population and land types, the natural resources (and their uses) in each area of the state are unique. Therefore, your local chapter has organized

and customized the following education categories to fit your local chapter's natural resource systems and needs. Your chapter's syllabus has been pre-approved by the Idaho Master Naturalist State Advisory Committee and State Program.

The core curriculum consists of 21 sections. Your chapter leaders have some flexibility in how they present these chapters, and some flexibility to delete and add chapters. In addition to the core curriculum, two specific tracks have been developed: Citizen Science Track and the Conservation Education Track. Check the sections your chapter will be covering in the education sessions. If you would like a copy of the sections not covered. They are available by request.

- ☐ Introduction to the Idaho Master Naturalist Program
  - ☐ American Naturalists
  - ☐ Nature Journaling
  - ☐ Citizen Science - Learning About the World with Science
  - ☐ Citizen Science - Practical Scientific Experience
  - ☐ Conservation Education – Interpretation
  - ☐ Land Use and Ownership in Idaho
  - ☐ Ecological Concepts
  - ☐ Ecological Regions of Idaho (large file, available in electronic version by request)
  - ☐ Ecosystems: Concepts and Management
  - ☐ Forest Ecology and Management
  - ☐ Wetlands Ecology and Management
  - ☐ Aquatic Ecology and Management
  - ☐ Rangeland Ecology and Management
- (Sagebrush Ecology was the predecessor to the Rangelands chapter and is not used by most IMN chapters.)
- ☐ Urban Systems
  - ☐ Geology and Soils of Idaho (large file, available in electronic version by request)
  - ☐ Nature of Naming
  - ☐ Plants
  - ☐ Ornithology
  - ☐ Entomology (Insects)
  - ☐ Ichthyology (Fishes)
  - ☐ Herpetology
  - ☐ Mammalogy

In addition to the core curriculum and the track curriculum, you have been given a binder to organize handouts and publications. Your chapter leaders may have you organize your binders in specific ways, but in general, the binder is to help you keep track of IMN education chapters, informative brochures, leaflets and publications.



## Service Projects

Good quality natural resource service projects are never in short supply, nor is there a service project that doesn't fit your interests, skills or abilities. Service projects can be identified through your local chapter partners, by you the volunteer, by the statewide program and program coordinator, or through your local chapter. Volunteer service can be short; one-time projects such as an annual butterfly survey or the service can be long term projects such as regular program delivery at a nature center.

Service project involvement also ranges from a single master naturalist project developed and carried out by an individual to entire chapters developing and carrying out "signature projects" and working on them as a group. Whatever the project or number of people involved, all service is generally performed within the geographic area served by the Master Naturalist chapter in which you were trained. Additionally, all projects must be pre-approved through your local chapter.

Forty hours of volunteer service must be completed for certification one year from the date of your first education class. You may start volunteering before your education sessions are over, or after the education is complete.

The nature and structure of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program is such that volunteer hours can be donated to many different projects involving natural resource agencies, schools, local governments, private landowners, parks and nature centers to name a few. Many projects and volunteer opportunities already exist and are in need of people. Although opportunities already exist, please don't allow this to stifle your creativity. There are many new and exciting ideas for projects still out there to be discovered. Your chapter may have restrictions on where you can volunteer for your Master Naturalist service requirement.

Currently, a number of specific projects and areas of need exist in which volunteers may participate. The future, however, will undoubtedly bring many new and exciting projects. Some of the current and typical service projects that take place in your region include:

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The most important feature you should look for in a volunteer project is how interested you are in doing it. The project should be interesting and you should feel excited about doing it. If you don't, you may not enjoy your service as much as you could. You will have a better experience and perform better work if you are inspired and interested in the project you have chosen.

If you are not sure what you will like, commit to short volunteer projects and perform a variety of tasks until you find something that is suited for your interests and skills.

Another way to choose a project is to find a person or organization with which you like to work. Perhaps you frequent a state park or you like to fish. These factors might influence you to volunteer for the park or in aquatic ecology research. You may know a professional with whom you find it easy and enjoyable to work alongside. This could be a good way to guide you to a project that you will like. Volunteer service toward conservation is for the benefit of Idaho's environment, but don't forget about you! You must be happy and having fun in order to keep volunteering and participating in conservation.

Time spent performing administrative work for your Idaho Master Naturalist Chapter may be counted as volunteer time. Chapters are encouraged to set a limit on the number of administrative hours a member can perform and tally as volunteer time. Organization of chapter events, education, meetings, and service opportunities are needed in order for chapters to run smoothly. Likewise, time spent responding to formal feedback requests from program leaders will be considered valid volunteer time.

### **Advanced Education**

Each year after your first year, 8 hours of advanced education is required. You may choose the education you want to attend. Education can include classes sponsored by the agency you are volunteering for, community education classes, on the "job" education with the biologist or conservation educator with whom you are working. Advanced education options are wide and flexible. Your advanced education must be approved by your agency representative ahead of time. Choose education options that will help you be a better volunteer, further your knowledge on a topic of interest, diversify your knowledge, or strengthen your skills.

- Television programs or educational movies will not be considered advanced training
- Travel time to and from education training will not be counted as education time.
- Idaho Master Naturalist chapters or participants may organize education for their chapter participants.

## **What are the benefits of being a Master Naturalist?**

Master Naturalist volunteers receive many benefits from being involved in the program. Some of the most rewarding, as indicated by other state's volunteers include:

- Helping to make a difference for their State's natural resources both now and in the future.

- Having the opportunity to learn from experts in the field through Master Naturalist training and advanced training.
- Having the opportunity to provide important and valuable natural resource information to others.
- Gaining an appreciation for and understanding of natural environments.
- Having the opportunity to build new friendships and working relationships with people sharing the same interests.
- Individual awards and recognition offered by the state program.

## **What are the responsibilities of an Idaho Master Naturalist?**

Upon beginning your natural resource education, you have one year to complete your volunteer service and advanced education hours to become certified as an Idaho Master Naturalist. The title “Master Naturalist” and “Idaho Master Naturalist” shall only be used by individuals active in the Idaho Master Naturalist Program. When an individual is no longer actively participates in the program, their designation as a Master Naturalist and/or Certified Master Naturalist becomes void.

The Master Naturalist name, title, and certification should never be displayed as an endorsement; as an advertisement; as credentials; in place of business; or identified with a particular political viewpoint and/or political advocacy. The Master Naturalist program is a public service program established to provide unbiased and scientific based information and management practices. Therefore, the title shall only be used when conducting unpaid Master Naturalist and Master Naturalist Chapter work. Remember, as a Master Naturalist, you are a representative of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and any other partnering agency sponsoring your chapter.

In addition, Master Naturalists should follow and respect the proper ethics, guidelines, laws and responsibilities as they relate to collecting specimens, species permits, landownership and landowner rights when conducting some volunteer projects. Unless specified in your volunteer project, you do not gain any special rights or exception to the laws by being an Idaho Master Naturalist.

Attaining and maintaining Master Naturalist Certification is your responsibility. An important part of that responsibility is record keeping. Documenting your observations, research, education, service, advanced education hours and the number of people or amount of the resource you were about to reach is your responsibility. The data from Master Naturalist volunteers are very valuable to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and partners. Well-maintained, accurate records provide a written account of the ways the agency and partners are serving the public and making an impact on our natural resources. These records also ensure the strong support of the program and its volunteers. Record keeping may be submitted by paper or

on an internet site. Your chapter leaders will help you find the proper forms and tell you how to submit them.

Master Naturalist volunteers together natural resource partners can better and manage natural resources, collect data, and reach more people with education programs. In short, Master Naturalist volunteers make these agencies more effective and efficient! As equally important, Master Naturalists also need to strive to manage their own programs by taking on coordinating, committee and/or leadership opportunities with their local chapter. However you occupy your time and talents as a Master Naturalist volunteer have fun with it and know that the program sponsors and our resources are grateful for your time and dedication.

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